

PR
3354
.G3

NUNC COGNOSCO EX PARTE



THOMAS J. BATA LIBRARY
TRENT UNIVERSITY

WARTON LECTURE ON ENGLISH POETRY

THE POETRY OF COLLINS

By H. W. GARROD

Professor of Poetry in the University of Oxford

Read February 29, 1928

PR 3354 . G3

WARTON LECTURE ON ENGLISH POETRY

THE POETRY OF COLLINS

By H. W. GARROD

Professor of Poetry in the University of Oxford

Read February 29, 1928

IF the Warton Lecturer must always remember Warton, he has a special duty to do so in 1928. The year marks the bicentenary of Warton's birth. It was natural that I should cast round for a subject that should be near to him. Of Warton himself, the praise was sufficiently spoken in 1910, by the first Warton Lecturer¹—by a scholar whose wide and catholic range, as well as the direction of some of his special interests in poetry, gave him some likeness to Warton. I may perhaps be thought to have Warton in sufficient remembrance, in this his year, if I take for my subject a poet with whom he was connected not only by the tie of familiar friendship but by common studies in poetry and by a common conception of the nature of poetry. It was to be near Warton that Collins came to Oxford in 1754. That was five years before his death. But already then his mortal sickness was upon him. He was not able without assistance to drag himself from his lodging in St. Aldate's to Warton's rooms in Trinity. In what tragedy the visit ended I have reason to be reminded daily; for my windows in Oxford look directly down on the spot where Gilbert White of Selborne speaks of seeing him 'in a very affecting situation, struggling and conveyed by force, in the arms of two or three men, towards the parish of St. Clement's, where there was a house which took in such un-

¹ W. P. Ker.

happy objects'. When, at a later date, Collins was removed to Chichester, both Tom Warton and his brother Joseph were among the friends—it is to be feared few in number—whose occasional visits cheered his last seclusion.

Whether either of the Wartons thought him a great poet may be doubted. Thomas Warton, it is true, in the second volume¹ of his *History of English Poetry*, speaks in a foot-note of 'my lamented friend Mr. William Collins, whose Odes will be remembered while any taste for true poetry remains'. But that was in 1778, and by that date Collins's Collected Works had gone through three editions.² Thrice, again, in his third volume Warton goes out of his way to mention 'the late Mr. Collins of Chichester'—not, however, as a poet, but as a student of Elizabethan literature. In Joseph Warton's works I recall only one reference to Collins (though there may be others). In a foot-note to one of the later editions of the *Essay on Pope* he speaks of Collins's 'strong and fruitful imagination', yet seems to rank him, even so, a little below West and Mason and Akenside. Yet a place of his own in the history of our poetry, high-raised above these mediocrities, Collins was just beginning to win. In 1781, the year in which the third volume of Warton's *History* appeared, Langhorne's edition of *The Poetical Works of Mr. William Collins* was printed for the third time. Johnson's *Life of Collins* was published in the same year. For Collins himself Johnson had a genuine affection: 'Collins whom I yet remember with tenderness', he writes. Yet his last word upon his poetry is that it belongs to that order which 'may sometimes extort praise when it gives little pleasure'. The sentence is the heavier from Johnson's obvious wish to be as kind as he can. Six

¹ Sect. xxxiii, p. 508 (ed. 1840).

² I reckon as the first edition of the Collected Works, not Langhorne's but the eleventh volume of Fawkes and Woty's *Poetical Calendar* (1763)—the twelfth volume adds the Ode on the Death of Thomson, and Johnson's Character of Collins. These two volumes founded Collins's repute.

years later, notwithstanding, the repute of Collins stood high enough to induce Foulis of Glasgow to invest him with the dignity of a folio. In the year following, his *Ode on the Superstitions of the Highlands* was printed for the first time, with a Dedication to Thomas and Joseph Warton; and before Joseph died, Collins's *Poetical Works* had run into yet three more editions. In 1815 it was possible for Wordsworth to speak of Collins as a poet whose poems, utterly neglected on their first appearance, had become 'universally known'.

Joseph Warton and Collins had been boys together—better still, they had been poets together—at Winchester. They continued poets together at Oxford. Collins was an undergraduate in his second year when he printed his *Persian Eclogues*.¹ At a later date he used to speak of them as his 'Irish Eclogues'. But which particular defects in them the epithet was meant to hit I do not know. Nor when a great critic, Hazlitt, says that 'parts' of them are 'admirable' can I guess which these parts are. Collins was still an undergraduate when he made his second venture in poetry—the verses 'humbly addressed' to Sir Thomas Hanmer. Of this poem Mr. Swinburne censures the 'lack of critical insight', while praising its versification as 'generally spirited and competent as well as fluent and smooth'. Lines like

Too nicely *Johnson* knew the Critic's Part;
Nature in him was almost lost in Art.

may perhaps be called both good criticism and competent verse. On the other hand when, addressing Shakespeare, Collins writes

O blest in all that Genius gives to charm,
Whose morals mend us, and whose Passions warm,

I should call the criticism bad and the verse both incompetent and without spirit.² Perhaps I read too much

¹ They were written, there is reason to believe, while he was still at school.

² In a second edition Collins altered the lines without improving them.

undergraduate poetry to be a fair judge. But I cannot think Collins's poem worthy either of him or of its occasion. It was called forth by the first Oxford edition of Shakespeare. The occasion was, therefore, an interesting one. But it was perhaps spoilt by Hanmer himself. Hanmer's *Shakespeare* is yet another reminder that the politician who turns scholar usually does so when he has forgotten what scholarship means.

Collins's first good poem was not written until he was just leaving Oxford. Very few of his poems are dated or certainly datable. But the Ode on *The Manners* is, on the face of it, a farewell to university studies by an undergraduate just going down. It is the poem which stands last but one in the volume of 1746.

The book bears date 1747, but it in fact appeared in December of the year preceding. In the same month and year appeared Joseph Warton's *Odes on Various Subjects*, with a Preface which passes for the first critical document of the romantic revival. Warton and Collins had projected a joint volume; and if the project had gone through Warton's Preface would have served, we may suppose, to introduce the poetry of both poets. That is worth remembering. But it is not worth making too much of. I have no wish, certainly, to belittle the 'romantic' elements in that movement of poetry and criticism of which the Wartons were a distinguished part. But I cannot disguise from myself, first, that it was an Oxford movement; secondly, that it was a Cambridge movement; and thirdly, that it was not a movement in the hearts and minds of men. It was an attempt at a literary revolution, of which the proper pre-condition was lacking, namely a spiritual revolution. It was preluded, not by the crash of thrones nor by any agonies of a spirit in man dying into life, but by a kind of literary boredom. There was, if I may say so, a change of taste, not a change of heart. The change of taste was something, was much, for latent in it was a sense of the very real distinction which there is between Pope and poetry.

But to see through Pope is not necessarily to see into poetry; nor is that insight, again, to be fetched from antiquarian study. It is a good thing to go back to Spenser and Milton; a good thing to tempt curiosity with shadows of the Runic and the Gothic. But when we have done all that, and only all that, we are still bookish. I am not complaining that 1742 was not 1789. But it is a fact that it was not; and a fact from which there flow important consequences. 1742 saw the fall of Walpole; and he made way—for the Pelhams. 1744 saw the death of Pope. Thomas Warton the elder celebrated the occasion by writing an *Ode to Taste*; Joe Warton by a satire in which, poking fun at the taste of his father's Ode, he makes the devil say that though Pope may have gone to heaven he has not found a place there among the poets. The colleges of Oxford and Cambridge began to consider the possibilities of a poetry which should reconcile the Gothic and the classic. It was all very well, but it was all too gentlemanly. You might hope much from it; but you could not hope the greatest things.

Nor did the greatest things happen. Nothing better happened than Collins in Oxford and Gray in Cambridge. If Collins had been asked what his poetry aimed at, what effects he supposed it to achieve, he might have been tempted, I fancy, to take for the description of it the lines in which he describes his own Temple of Liberty:

In *Gothic* Pride it seems to rise!
Yet *Graecia's* graceful Orders join,
Majestic thro' the mix'd Design.

Very Wartonish lines—years after, Tom Warton recalled them in his verses to Sir Joshua Reynolds, where he makes it the praise of that artist that he was able

With arts unknown before, to reconcile
The willing Graces to the Gothic pile.

Even so I cannot but think that the best both of Collins and of Gray proceeds from conditions where the distinction of classic and Gothic has very little meaning.

Let me say at once that when I speak of the best of Collins I am not one of those who think the volume of 1746 pure gold. Worse still, I think that too much praise, and the wrong praise, has been given to the *Ode on the Superstitions of the Highlands*. That very interesting but too laboured piece has passages of a sweet and grave beauty, and in one of its stanzas reaches a singular Keats-like felicity. But I cannot think that a distinguished living critic has praised it well when he speaks of its 'pure lyric elevation and rapture'. Elevation it has, or the best parts of it have. But wings, fire, and all that swiftness and urgency which belongs to *lyric rapture* seem to me wanting. The same critic, speaking of Collins's work as a whole, says that 'there are very few poets from whose wheat so little chaff has been winnowed as from that of Collins'. I cannot think *that* true. I hardly think it much truer than some of the hyperbolic praises which Mr. Swinburne lavished upon Collins. 'In the little book of Odes', says Mr. Swinburne, 'which dropped a still-born immortal from the press, and was finally burnt up even to the last procurable copy by the hands of its author in a fever-fit of angry despair, there was hardly a single false note; and there were not many less than sweet and strong. There was above all things a purity of music, a clarity of style, to which I know no parallel in English verse from the death of Andrew Marvell to the birth of William Blake. Here in the twilight which followed the splendid sunset of Pope, was at last a poet who was content to sing out what he had in him—to sing and not to say, without a glimpse of wit or a flash of eloquence.'

I know only one poem of Collins of which I should be prepared to say that it had 'hardly a single false note'; only one of which I should predicate 'clarity of style'; only one of which I should call the music throughout 'pure'. I mean, not the *Ode to Evening*, but the lines which begin 'How sleep the brave who sink to rest . . .'. Perhaps even there the 'Pilgrim grey' and the 'weeping hermit' trail clouds of 'Gothic' affectation. But the piece is at least near

enough to perfect to make any critical objection ungracious. It is, I think, the only piece of Collins which moves with unarrested fluency, with real inevitability in its sequences. That is the stranger for the fact that its perfections can be shown to be hard-won. For these two perfect stanzas are, in fact, a refashioning of three stanzas of a far less perfect poem, the *Ode on the Death of Colonel Ross*.

I deprecate the exaggerated praise of Collins for the reason that it makes him much less interesting than he is. He is not, I feel, one of the great *natural* poets, one of the poets who are 'content to sing out'. Still less is he a perfect poet; but a poet, in every part of his craft, almost everywhere, I think, singularly imperfect. And that said plainly, he is ten times more interesting than Mr. Swinburne either found him or left him. After all, when the volume of 1746 was published, Collins was twenty-five; and the interesting thing about the book is not its perfections but its potentialities. That is particularly worth insisting on when we compare, as we must, Collins and Gray. I say 'as we must'. Criticism, I know, has always found it hard to love at one and the same time both Gray and Collins. It was easy for Dr. Johnson to disparage both of them in equal degree, and intelligible that he should do so. But writers subsequent to Dr. Johnson have found it hard to praise one of them without using the other spitefully. Wordsworth, in his letters and Prefaces and in his poems, has confessed his fondness for Collins. But he would never be persuaded that Gray was a poet at all. Even the *Elegy* was 'unintelligible' to him. 'It has, however', as Hazlitt says drily, 'been understood.' Mr. Swinburne, who lavishes on the Odes of Collins that extravagance of praise which I have noticed, will not allow any merit to the Odes of Gray—the power and beauty of the *Elegy* he, unlike Wordsworth, recognizes generously. Yet after exhausting upon Gray's lyrics all the vocabulary of disparagement it is a want of humour in him to beg of critics hereafter that they should refrain from the comparison of Gray and Collins altogether, that they should

drop a criticism which they can only conduct in a spirit uselessly partisan. Except that Wordsworth and Mr. Swinburne and some others have done it badly, I see no reason at all for not comparing these two poets. To compare them is, indeed, the most natural thing in the world. I can see reasons for not comparing Keats and Shelley—two poets in respect of whom, once again, it seems to be a rule of criticism to love the one by depreciating the other. The best reason for not comparing Keats and Shelley is that they are singularly unlike. They neither invite comparison nor reward it. But Gray and Collins do invite comparison.

What ought to be said by any one who compares them can be said, I believe, succinctly. Gray's literary history—so far as his poetry is concerned—is a very simple one. In 1742 he wrote three Odes of which it is fair to say that they would not to-day be much regarded if he had not written, in 1754, two very much better ones. Of those three Odes I think it the principal glory that without one of them, the *Hymn to Adversity*, we should not have had Wordsworth's *Ode to Duty*. But the two Odes of 1754—*The Progress of Poesy*, that is to say, and *The Bard*—our literature could ill spare. Both these poems I take to be better verse and better poetry than anything that is to be found in Collins outside his two master-poems—outside the *Ode to Evening* and 'How sleep the Brave . . .'. On the other hand, until he had read Collins, Gray wrote nothing as good as much that Collins had written. Gray's assimilative faculty was immense—it is hardly to disparage him to say that it was his most distinctive talent; and I have the suspicion that his best owes something to the best of Collins. Even in the *Elegy* he has not disdained to remember Collins's *Ode to Evening*—the second stanza of the *Elegy* plainly echoes the third of the *Ode*. Gray was a better scholar than Collins, and when he wrote his two best Odes he was close on forty—Collins's work is that of a young man of twenty-five, defective in scholarship and experience. Upon the best of Gray you will exclaim, 'What perfections!' Upon the best

of Collins, 'What potentialities!' Matthew Arnold has said of Gray that 'he never spoke out', in poetry. I am not sure that it is true. I have the sense always that Gray went as far as he could. I never feel that his Odes, with their very special perfections, promise anything greater in their own kind. The perfections of the *Elegy* are more general and more obvious. But these too seem to me very *finished* perfections; they seem, I mean, to end with themselves, to have no forward gaze, no reaching out of hands, no insistence, no cry. The renown of them is fulfilled.

By contrast with all this, it is as an 'inheritor of unfulfilled renown' that Collins is interesting. I wish that we knew of him as much as we know of Keats, or even of Chatterton. The points of contact with Keats are numerous; and upon some of them, if I had time, I would gladly dwell, and might, I think, do so profitably. I must content myself here with urging the need that there is to read Collins rather differently, and perhaps more attentively, than he is read by those who praise him most. I feel, I confess, the appeal much more of his imperfections than of his perfections. I am more impressed with his interestingness than with his greatness. With those who praise him too much, who praise not merely 'How sleep the brave . . .' and the *Ode to Evening* but all of him, I feel this much sympathy that I think all of him well worth study. These two poems, perhaps, will alone escape the 'iniquity of oblivion' and the poppy which the anthologist scatters blindly. Yet the whole volume of 1746 deserves attention. I wonder what account of it could the average student of literature give. Of how many poems, outside the two I have mentioned, and perhaps the *Ode on the Passions* and the *Ode to Simplicity*, could he so much as furnish the names? Does any one, I wonder, ever think of Collins as a patriotic poet? Yet the central portion of his book is occupied by five patriotic Odes—five out of a total of twelve—called forth by the occasions of 1745-6.¹

¹ The *Ode to Peace* is I think misplaced, by an error of the printer. It

The earliest poem in the volume is, I have already said, that entitled *The Manners*. In it Collins bids farewell to Oxford and Oxford philosophy. If ever he makes a return upon philosophy it will be not in the pure spirit of science but with the hope to conquer, by the aid of Philosophy, the Passions and the Follies. The personal touch is intriguing. 'A poet', says one of Collins's editors, 'a poet, and not to have felt the tender passion, would be a creature which the world has never yet seen. It is said that Collins was extremely fond of a young lady . . . who did not return his affections.' The young lady became, in fact, the promised bride of the Colonel Ross to whose memory Collins dedicated the Ode which I have already mentioned—the Ode out of which sprang later 'How sleep the brave . . .'. Whether this lady was ranked by Collins, when he wrote *The Manners*, as among his Passions or his Follies we can only guess. It is at least interesting that we owe to her, indirectly, through Ross, his best poem.

The Manners bids farewell to Philosophy and announces its poet's intention to give himself henceforth to the observation of society, of the human comedy:

Thy walks, Observance, more invite.

'Observance' grates. But that a place should be found for this goddess in poetry is interesting; and the poem down to line 30 is good and spirited. From that point grammatical obscurities and awkwardnesses begin to show themselves. The conclusion of the poem invokes 'Nature boon', in whose guidance the youthful Collins proposes to see life:

The Sports and I this Hour agree
To rove the sceneful world with Thee!

There you have (and it is well, perhaps even pleasant, to remember him) the Collins who went about London (says his friend Mr. Ragsdale) 'gaily dressed, with a feather in his hat', presenting an appearance 'by no means that of should precede, and not follow, the *Ode to Evening*. The five patriotic Odes make then a continuous section. That the *Ode to Peace* has been misplaced seems indicated by the false catchword at the end of it (p. 40, 1747).

a young man who had not a single guinea he could call his own', the Collins who 'had the liberty of the scenes and the green-room'. Mr. Ragsdale adds, it is fair to say, that our poet 'made diverting observations on the vanity and consequence of that class of people', to wit actors and the floating population of green-rooms.

This earliest of Collins's Odes has about it, accordingly, something of the spirit of the years to which it belongs. Collins's father, 'a hatter', according to Dr. Johnson, 'of good reputation', had destined his son for a more gentlemanly profession. He wished to make him a clergyman. In London, however, Collins was induced 'by a wealthy tobacconist in Fleet Street' to abandon the idea of taking orders. I would give much to know a little more of the wealthy tobacconist. His name was Hardham; and he was interested in the theatres. It is thought likely that Collins entertained at this time the project of writing for the stage. He in fact began on a task which may be thought as good a preparation as any for the career of a playwright. He undertook a translation of Aristotle's *Poetics*. To his preoccupation with the *Poetics* we owe, it can hardly be doubted, the two Odes which stand first in the volume of 1746—the Odes addressed to Pity and Fear. Collins's Pity and Fear are the Pity and Fear of Aristotle—personifications of the two essentially tragic passions. Neither Ode can rank high as poetry. But the *Ode to Pity* is interesting for its reference to the tragedian Otway; and that to Fear from the circumstance that its concluding lines seem to announce in Collins the ambition of tragic poetry. One stanza of the *Ode to Fear*, again, hints that his mind is already dwelling on patriotic themes. Speaking of Aeschylus Collins recalls that that great artist in tragic fear fought at Marathon:

For not alone he nurs'd the Poet's flame,
But reach'd from Virtue's Hand the Patriot's Steel.

Patriotic themes constitute, as I have noticed, the most considerable single section of the volume of 1746. This

pair of Odes, however, is separated from the patriotic section by another pair, the *Ode to Simplicity* and the *Ode on the Poetical Character*. Both poems contain better poetry than anything of Collins which had preceded them, and for a good reason. The first of them is written in a metre of Milton—each of its nine stanzas is metrically equivalent to the first six lines of the stanza in which the Nativity Hymn is written. The second of them, the *Ode on the Poetical Character*, is in effect an Ode on the poetical character of Milton. The *Ode to Simplicity* has been, I think, a good deal overpraised. But it illustrates the development of Collins's poetical ambitions:

I only seek to find thy temp'rate Vale:
Where oft my Reed might sound
To Maids and Shepherds round,
And all thy Sons, O Nature, learn my Tale.

There is no hint more of the ambition of tragic poetry, nor of any kind of heroic verse. Collins is looking to pastoral; it is there that he hopes to find his true field. And what kind of pastoral, the *Ode on the Poetical Character* puts beyond doubt. Collins describes himself as withdrawing from love-poetry—upon which, indeed, we did not know him to have been engaged, but we may take his word for it. He retreats 'from Waller's Myrtle Shades', and views

that Oak, the fancied Glades among,
By which as Milton lay, His Ev'ning Ear,
From many a Cloud that drop'd Ethereal Dew,
Nigh spher'd in Heav'n its native Strains could hear.

The Oak is 'th' accustom'd Oke' of *Il Penseroso*. Milton's 'Ev'ning Ear' is bad. But the Ode announces purer strains than any which itself offers. If Collins had known how to arrange his book, there should have followed directly upon it

If ought of Oaten Stop, or Pastoral Song,
May hope, O pensive *Eve*, to soothe thine Ear,
Like thy own solemn Springs,
Thy Springs, and dying Gales . . .

It is poetry of this order to which the *Ode on the Poetical Character* points; and we may well think that Collins judged truly where his best powers lay. Of the *Ode to Evening* I will only here remark, first, that it is written in a stanza invented by Milton, and used between Milton and Collins by all three of the Wartons but by no one else; secondly, that if the diction of the poem is purer than Collins's diction mostly is, that is because so great a part of it is derived from Milton. I know no poem so beautiful or so famous of which the diction is in an equal degree derivative. And I say that not in disparagement, but quite the contrary. Collins had yet to find an individual manner; and that he should do so plainly nothing could hinder save unkind fate—the fate that froze at their marvellous source all his mortal powers.

The *Ode on the Poetical Character* has not, I think, had the praise it deserves. A great deal of it is almost absurdly faulty. But at least the second stanza of it hints powers of a high order. The Magic Band, or girdle, of lyric poetry can be assumed, Collins says, only by him for whom it is predestined:

The Band, as Fairy Legends say,
Was wove on that creating Day,
When He, who call'd with Thought to Birth
Yon tented Sky, this laughing Earth,
And drest with Springs, and Forests tall,
And pour'd the Main engirthing all,
Long by the lov'd *Enthusiast* woo'd,
Himself in some Diviner Mood,
Retiring sate with her alone,
And plac'd her on his Saphire Throne,
The whiles, the vaulted Shrine around,
Seraphic Wires were heard to sound,
Now sublimest Triumph swelling,
Now on Love and Mercy dwelling;
And she, from out the veiling Cloud,
Breath'd her magic Notes aloud:
And Thou, Thou rich-hair'd Youth of Morn,
And all thy subject Life was born!

The dangerous Passions kept aloof,
 Far from the sainted growing Woof:
 But near it sate Ecstatic *Wonder*,
 List'ning the deep applauding Thunder:
 And *Truth*, in sunny Vest array'd,
 By whose the Tarsel's Eyes were made;
 All the shad'wy Tribes of *Mind*,
 In braided Dance their Murmurs join'd,
 And all the bright uncounted *Pow'rs*
 Who feed on Heav'n's ambrosial Flow'rs.
 Where is the Bard, whose Soul can now
 Its high presuming Hopes avow?
 Where He who thinks, with Rapture blind,
 This hallow'd Work for Him design'd?

The boldness, let me say, of the imagery here is surprising, is almost astonishing. I am not sure that either Shelley or Keats, certainly not Milton or Wordsworth, would have ventured to conceive God Himself as wooed 'by the lov'd Enthusiast', Fancy; to speak of God as 'Himself in some diviner Mood' retiring; of God sitting *alone with Fancy*; of Fancy seated on the Sapphire Throne—when Collins took that phrase from Milton he hardly forgot that Milton's Sapphire Throne was the Throne of Christ.

The poem is followed, as I have said, by the five patriotic Odes. 'How sleep the brave . . .' leads the line, as it should. Of the four Odes that follow it I have never been able to think highly. Perhaps of *Liberty*—so much praised by so many persons—I think less highly than I should. Yet even here, 'What potentialities!' I am moved to exclaim. They are the potentialities of a Shelley, a Coleridge. Where, in this period of Walpoles and Pelhams, Collins learned to conceive of Liberty so much in the spirit of the great romantics I do not know. Upon the five patriotic odes follow *Evening* and *The Manners*. Next to *The Manners* is placed, as it had to be, *The Passions*; and with this celebrated composition Collins ends his book. With a few words upon this Ode let me end what I have to say about Collins.

The Passions is called 'An Ode for Music'. It might better

have been called 'An Ode *on* Music'. It handles the theme of music in a manner very similar to that in which the *Ode to Simplicity* handles the theme of poetry—so similar, indeed, that despite obvious differences I am inclined to think the two pieces written about the same time. What is the matter with music, in *The Passions*, is what is the matter with poetry in the *Ode to Simplicity*: the loss of *nature*. The ideal music is to be sought where the ideal poetry is to be sought—in Greece; and for one and the same reason. Greece first illustrated the power, in both arts, of *nature*. The action and effects of the Passions which the Ode called after them describes are designed to illustrate the power of nature, and in doing so to point the contrast with modern music. In the 'lov'd Athenian Bow'r' Music 'learn'd an all-commanding Pow'r'. But whither now is that power fled?

Where is thy native simple Heart,
Devote to Virtue, Fancy, Art?
Arise as in that elder Time,
Warm, Energetic, Chaste, Sublime!
Thy Wonders in that God-like Age
Fill thy recording Sister's page—

the 'recording Sister' is of course Poetry, the natural poetry which the *Ode to Simplicity* honours.

The Passions is certainly the boldest of Collins's Odes. Being in truth, as I say, an Ode *on* Music, it necessarily invites comparison with Dryden. But Collins is not merely courageous enough to risk the comparison: he deliberately, in the close of his poem, challenges it, when he speaks of

Caecilia's mingled world of Sound.

He may at least be allowed to have caught from Dryden three qualities which he exhibits here in greater measure than anywhere else: swiftness and fire and variety of sound-effect. His temperament, again, if it had less of power than Dryden's, had more of true poetical quality. He was not capable of some of Dryden's trivialities—Dryden, if truth be told, does not always remember the breadth and depth

and height which separate the hall of his Macedonian king from a London music-hall. I feel this (though I hardly dare say so) even in the pleasant jingle of 'Happy, happy, happy Pair!' And once more—if Collins is sometimes too much afraid of the language of prose Dryden is very often indeed too little afraid of it. The familiar touch in

'twas sad by Fits, by Starts 'twas wild

offends in Collins, but would pass, perhaps, without remark in Dryden. Collins's more usual fault is the opposite. When the eyes of *Revenge* start out of his head Collins says so, not plainly, but in a manner more alienating than the most homely plainness:

While each strained Ball of Sight seem'd bursting from his Head
—'seeming to think' (I quote here Dr. Johnson) 'that not to write prose is certainly to write poetry'.

In one particular Collins is plainly inferior to Dryden. Dryden's Ode is better conceived; and he has thought his way through it better. It has a *developing* conception; it moves to a plan; with each stanza there is advance; and the poem ends where it must. The conception of Collins is straggling; he moves to no particular end, which can be seen beforehand and felt when it comes; and the order of advance is ragged. The behaviour of the Passions is everywhere in Dryden's Ode what it nowhere is in Collins's—an ordered succession of psychological happenings.

The Passions who, in Collins's Ode, on no particular day and to no defined purpose sound the various instruments of the 'Heavenly Maid', Music, appear in the order Fear, Anger, Despair, Hope, Revenge, Pity, Jealousy, Melancholy, Chearfulness, Joy—I omit those Passions that are not performers, but merely sit and listen, or listen and leap. Whether Chearfulness has any place among the Passions at all may well be thought doubtful. Nor is it easy to discover any principle determining precedence among the different Passions. The first four all take for their instrument the

Lyre. But it is I think not wholly captious to say that only *Fear* and *Hope* really do anything with it:

First *Fear* his Hand, its Skill to try,
Amid the Chords bewilder'd laid,
And back recoil'd he knew not why,
Ev'n at the Sound himself had made.

Admirable ! But then comes *Anger*:

Next *Anger* rush'd; his Eyes on fire¹
In Lightnings own'd his secret Stings:
In one rude Clash he struck the Lyre,
And swept with hurried Hand the Strings—

'And back recoil'd'—or what? The action of *Fear* issues in an effect, which is given; and an expectation is created that the effect of *Anger's* action will be stated or hinted. But to the action neither of *Anger* nor of *Despair* is any effect attached. With *Hope* we fare better:

A soft responsive Voice was heard at ev'ry Close,
And *Hope* enchanted smil'd, and wav'd Her golden Hair.

Even so, the last five words have a touch of absurdity. *Revenge*, who follows, both blows a trumpet and beats a 'doubling drum'. In the pauses 'dejected *Pity*'

Her soul-subduing Voice applied;

but to what we are not told—indeed, *Pity*, who has to get her word in edgewise where she can between trumpet and drum, does not altogether escape out of the ludicrous. *Jealousy*, who succeeds, has no instrument, or none that her poet thought worth speaking of. But *Melancholy* 'pours thro' the mellow Horn her pensive Soul'; and save for 'mellow Horn' she is well described. The 'mellow Horn' is also, for some reason which I do not divine, the instrument of *Chearfulness*. *Joy*, on the other hand, employs both Pipe and Viol. Both these allegoric personages, again, are alike in their acts and circumstances well described; and indeed lines 57–94 of this Ode are as good, both in diction and in the quality

¹ I have corrected the punctuation here. Collins's pointing is always bad, and often plainly wrong.

of their music, as anything in Collins. It must be added that both the prologue and the epilogue to the Ode are in Collins's best manner. That the poem was written with something of the *furor arduus* proper to odic composition—at least that it was written in a hurry—may be inferred from the fact that two of its lines, 45 and 85, end in words for which Collins has forgotten to find rhyme-correspondence. For two other verses, again, 29 and 44, he *very nearly* forgot to find rhymes—we have to wait nine lines in the one case, ten in the other, before he hands in the tallies. But the ear of most readers, probably, will miss these accidents¹—a tribute surely to the spirit and beauty of the poem as a whole.

A good many persons have thought this poem Collins's masterpiece. I agree with Mr. Swinburne that it is not that. It falls short of being that for the same reason as makes so much of Collins's poetry fall short of the best. There is too great a defect of human quality. Collins, says Dr. Johnson, in his simple, adequate fashion, 'did not sufficiently cultivate the sentiments'. *The Passions* wants sentiment and mystery. Collins's poetry as a whole wants sentiment and mystery—no one perhaps has ever taken Collins to his heart. Sentiment and mystery: by these things poetry lives—so at least I am old-fashioned enough to believe. By these things poetry lives. *Et tout le reste est littérature.*

¹ I am not sure about line 85; the ear does wait, I think, for the answering rhyme. It was because my ear missed the rhyme-correspondence here that I was led to hunt out the similar defect at line 45. Collins was careless about the printing of his poems; and I am not sure that a line is not actually lost before 85. In 83-4 *Joy* is only said to *see* the Viol; he is nowhere said to *sound* it. But 85 has

They would have thought who heard the Strain . . .
—the Strain which is, in fact, not further hinted than by 'saw the brisk awakening Viol' in 83.

PR 3354 .G3
Garrod, Heathcote William
The poetry of Collins. --

010101 000



0 1999 0013790 2
TRENT UNIVERSITY

PR3354 .G3
Garrod, Heathcote William
The poetry of Collins

DATE

ISSUED TO

251117

251117

